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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 000201

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER, TEITELBAUM
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [Z1](#)

SUBJECT: GUTU ELECTION DAYS CALM BUT IRREGULARITIES PERSIST

REF: HARARE 122

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER KIMBERLY JEMISON FOR REASONS 1.5 B/D

11. Summary. (C) Observations by Poloff two diplomatic colleagues, and the Zimbabwe Election Support Unit (as reported by both the independent and state-owned press) of the Gutu North parliamentary by-election indicate that voting was calm and observers more welcome than in previous elections. Nonetheless, several electoral irregularities as reported in the press and to embassy personnel suggest that the process is still not transparent, free, or fair and will need substantial revision prior to the next parliamentary elections in 2005. End Summary.

Everything Calm on Voting Days

12. (U) On February 3, Poloff visited Gutu North to observe the second day of voting in the parliamentary by-election for the seat left vacant by Vice President Simon Muzenda's death. Poloff observed very little activity in the five polling stations she visited. Unlike previous elections, the polling stations were free of campaign literature and party supporters and Poloff had little difficulty entering the polling stations. The presiding officers were helpful and willing to chat about voting activity. (Note: The week prior to the election, The Herald ran an article in which it paraphrases the Electoral Supervisory Commission rule that allows accredited diplomats to enter polling stations to observe voting using only their official diplomatic identity cards. End Note.) Poloff was warmly received at the Gutu North Command Center, where she made a courtesy call, and was given a list of polling stations. Although there was a visible police presence, they were helpful rather than threatening.

13. (U) Diplomatic colleagues from other missions visited Gutu North on February 2 and noted the calm and absence of obvious campaigning and violence, an observation shared by the electoral watchdog Zimbabwe Election Support Unit (ZESN). The diplomats had more difficulty entering the first polling station than Poloff even after getting a letter from the constituency registrar but then had no problem entering the other two they visited. ZESN lamented some electoral officials and party representatives, lack of familiarity with the rules regarding observers, as there were problems with other observers gaining access to polling stations.

Electoral Irregularities Persist

14. (U) The period preceding the election was fraught with allegations of electoral irregularities and violence in the constituency. The Daily News reported on 2 February that the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) alleged that ZANU-PF, through the Registrar General, added 7000 voters from Harare to the Gutu North voters roll. In the same article, the MDC claimed to have not seen the consolidated voters roll for the Gutu North election, as the law prescribes. The Zimbabwe Independent (30 Jan) quoted a ZESN report condemning ZANU-PF's alleged donations at rallies as not following procedure and akin to vote-buying.

15. (U) The independent press has published several articles highlighting violence in the run up to the election. The Daily News reported on 30 January that suspected ZANU-PF supporters stoned buildings and set ablaze a hut owned by MDC supporters earlier in the week. In another incident, the MDC candidate Crispa Musoni alleged that ZANU-PF supporters held him hostage. The Zimbabwe Independent reported that at least two people had been kidnapped and tortured in the weeks preceding the election.

16. (C) Comment. Despite the seeming tranquility of the election on voting days, the election cannot be judged to be free or fair because the process is still not transparent nor

does it follow the independent election procedures, as recommended by the SADC Parliamentary Forum. Press reports on violence, fraudulent voter participation, and the absence of free campaigning cast a pall on ZANU-PF efforts to promote this election as being free and fair. End Comment.
SULLIVAN